Witnesses to Freedom

Compare two nineteenth-century antislavery narratives.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.9 "Demonstrate knowledge of eighteenth-, nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century foundational works of American literature, including how two or more texts from the same period treat similar themes or topics."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline one detail in paragraph 2 and one detail in paragraph 3 that support the writers' shared claim about slavery. Circle two details that reveal different emphases, and label them D for Douglass or J for Jacobs.

Two Narratives, One Cause

1. In the nineteenth century, autobiographical narratives became powerful antislavery arguments. Frederick Douglass published Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave in 1845, and Harriet Jacobs published Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl in 1861. Both authors had escaped slavery and wrote for readers who might doubt enslaved people's testimony. Each work insists that slavery damages human dignity by showing people treated as property rather than as independent individuals. Yet the writers shape that shared argument through different experiences, intended audiences, and narrative choices.

2. Douglass emphasizes the way slavery tries to control a person's mind. He recalls learning to read in Baltimore after Sophia Auld begins teaching him, then stops when her husband objects. Douglass presents literacy as a route toward clearer thought and resistance. He also describes physical violence, including the beating of his aunt Hester and his fight with Edward Covey. Although the narrative recounts his life in slavery and his arrival in freedom, Douglass does not reveal how he escaped, explaining that disclosure could help enslavers capture future escapees.

3. Jacobs focuses on dangers that slavery created especially for women and children. Writing under the name Linda Brent, she describes her enslaver's sexual harassment and her effort to protect her children. Her seven years hidden in a tiny crawlspace above her grandmother's storeroom show both endurance and the cost of pursuing freedom. Jacobs directly addresses Northern women, asking them to recognize that enslaved mothers could not reliably protect their families. Where Douglass stresses literacy and public resistance, Jacobs stresses family bonds, gendered vulnerability, and survival within a household.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. What shared argument about slavery do Douglass and Jacobs make?

2. Compare the ways Douglass and Jacobs present resistance or survival. Give one emphasis from each narrative.

3. Why does Douglass not reveal how he escaped, and how does this choice connect to his purpose?

4. What audience does Jacobs directly address, and what does she ask that audience to recognize? How does this focus differ from Douglass's emphasis?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Choose two foundational American works published in the same century between 1776 and 1917, excluding the two works in this passage. In 120 to 150 words, compare how the works treat one shared theme, naming both works, using one accurate detail from each, and explaining one important difference in their approaches.

Witnesses to Freedom

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline one detail in paragraph 2 and one detail in paragraph 3 that support the writers' shared claim about slavery. Circle two details that reveal different emphases, and label them D for Douglass or J for Jacobs. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	What shared argument about slavery do Douglass and Jacobs make?	**Both argue that slavery violates human dignity by treating people as property instead of independent individuals.**
2	Compare the ways Douglass and Jacobs present resistance or survival. Give one emphasis from each narrative.	**Douglass emphasizes literacy and public resistance. Jacobs emphasizes protecting family, enduring confinement, and surviving dangers within a household.**
3	Why does Douglass not reveal how he escaped, and how does this choice connect to his purpose?	**He fears the details could help enslavers capture future escapees. Withholding them protects others seeking freedom.**
4	What audience does Jacobs directly address, and what does she ask that audience to recognize? How does this focus differ from Douglass's emphasis?	**Jacobs addresses Northern women and asks them to recognize that enslaved mothers could not reliably protect their families. Her focus on family and gendered vulnerability differs from Douglass's emphasis on literacy and public resistance.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Ralph Waldo Emerson's "Self-Reliance" and Henry David Thoreau's "Civil Disobedience" both argue that individuals should follow conscience rather than simply conform. Emerson treats independence mainly as an inward practice. He urges readers to trust themselves and rejects blind imitation of other people's ideas. Thoreau applies a similar principle to public action. After refusing to pay a poll tax that supported a government connected to slavery and the Mexican-American War, he argues that citizens should not cooperate with injustice. Thus, Emerson emphasizes personal originality and spiritual independence, while Thoreau emphasizes resistance to unjust government. Both works value the individual, but Thoreau makes disobedience a specific political duty. The difference matters because Emerson seeks a transformed self, whereas Thoreau asks that self to challenge public power.

Accept equivalent comparisons that accurately connect specific details to the writers' shared argument and different emphases. For Part 3, accept any accurate pair of eligible foundational American works from the same century if the response meets the word count and includes comparison, evidence, and a meaningful difference.